



# Assessment Roles and Activities: A Framework for Identifying Professional Competencies of Assessment

## **AALHE State of Assessment Project Team**

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# Research

## **Natasha Jankowski and Ruth C Slotnick (2015)**

**1:1 Interviews with 4 experts; review of literature; review job postings**

Developed five essential roles for assessment practitioners.

## **University of Kentucky (2015)**

**377 higher ed professionals** - majority at Director level or above.

This study examined the demographic factors, external activities in Institutional Effectiveness, and perceptions of those individuals relating to job security, perceived barriers, and job satisfaction.

## **TaskStream Survey (2016)**

**1074 respondents** who were employed full time and involved in assessment at a college or university; 53% were Taskstream users.

The purpose of the study was “to gain additional insights into assessment and accreditation efforts at colleges and universities across the country.”

# Assessment Roles

There is a partial overlap between the six areas of assessment practice identified in the analysis of the survey and the five assessment roles highlighted by Natasha Jankowski and Ruth C Slotnick (2015):

- Visionary / Believer
- Narrator / Translator
- Facilitator / Guide
- Political Navigator
- Assessment/Method Expert

# Assessment Practice in the View of Practitioners

Data from the Taskstream survey provides some insight into assessment practice from the practitioners' points of view. The analysis of responses to the questions "What do you enjoy most about assessment" and "What do you enjoy least about assessment" reveals six main areas of assessment work:

- Collaboration / Engagement
- Assessment Design
- Data Collection and Management
- Data Analysis
- Communication /Sharing of Results
- Using Assessment Results



# Assessment Roles and Activities in Higher Ed

# Collaboration/Engagement - Activities

Includes activities such as:

- Working with faculty and stakeholders on instrument design
- Providing technical guidance and support
- Maintaining conversations about assessment.

These conversations are aimed at:

- Gaining faculty “buy-in” towards assessment
- Engaging faculty in assessment work
- Explaining the importance and value of assessment
- Explaining what assessment is and how to do assessment
- Overcoming resistance to assessment
- Dispelling negative perceptions and misunderstandings about assessment.

# Collaboration/Engagement - Roles

Job advertisements targeting facilitator/guide roles require:

- Candidates who could serve as **faculty collaborators**
- The ability to **work across disciplines** for continuous program improvement.
- An understanding of various **campus cultures**,
- An interdisciplinary stance for **engaging with faculty**
- The ability to **build assessment literacy** among faculty/staff
- **Engaging others** in conversations
- **Collaborating with a network** of colleagues across the institution

The assessment practitioner's role of facilitator/guide is one of ***assisting others to undertake assessment*** (Jankowski & Slotnik, 2015)

# Collaboration/Engagement - Roles

Job postings targeting political navigator roles required:

- Strong **interpersonal skills**
- An ability to work effectively with a **range of stakeholders** (including liaising with national, regional, state and local organizations)
- **Collaborating with non-academic** units.

Assessment practitioners need to understand **internal issues of language, culture, and power** as well as multiple ways of framing and identifying problems.

Assessment practitioners **review a variety of data, compose reports, present findings**, and otherwise frame assessment and results of assessment within the institution and externally. They help **frame problems and possible solutions**.

There is a **fear of negative results and issues of power and occurrences of data suppression that must be overcome** to engage in dialogue as to what the results may mean for students and the institution. (Jankowski & Slotnik, 2015)



# Collaboration/Engagement - Favorable Aspects

“I love dialoguing with faculty about the assessment data they are collecting and how they can use the information they collect to continuously improve student learning.”

“The discussions surrounding the clarification of what is important and what we are actually trying to DO through the course, curriculum, whatever. The quest for common understanding that actually precedes the design of rubrics and assignments is the most satisfying for me.”

“Working with faculty and chairs to help them understand the value of assessment.” (Taskstream survey)

# Collaboration/Engagement - Challenges

- “I don't enjoy explaining and "selling" the benefits of assessment to faculty who have no background in assessment.”
- “Having to collaborate with uncooperative faculty who are uninterested in the task or have a myopic view that assessment should be limited to their program's outcomes and the institutional outcomes disregarded.”
- “Lack of faculty and staff engagement and the federal government putting pressure on accrediting bodies to force assessment for accountability purposes instead of improvement purposes.”
- “I guess what frustrates me the most is when people make negative assumptions about assessment and do not cooperate with turning in their results.” (Taskstream survey)
- “The relationships between assessment and institutional research. Some still perceive those to be very different and do not see the synergies and efficiencies they present if they are housed together and work together.” (UKY survey)

# Assessment Design - Activities

Includes activities such as designing and creating an assessment system, assessment methods, “signature assignments,” and assessment tools:

- Setting up a system to measure student learning
- Developing authentic assessments
- Designing assessment instruments and rubrics
- Determining the validity and reliability of assessments
- Consulting with clients and improving their assessment processes

# Assessment Design - Favorable Aspects

“Figuring out how to set up a system of assessment that uses data from student work/performance to understand what students are learning at the course, program, and institutional levels and to improve that learning where there are gaps.”

“Designing authentic performance assessments that align well with learning outcomes and instruction.”

“The ‘squishy elements’ (i.e., the hard to measure ones which respond better to verbiage than to mathematics).” (Taskstream survey)

# Assessment Design - Challenges

“Trying to figure out what to measure and the value of the data being collected.”

“Creating the frameworks for successful assessment.”

“There are so many different entities expecting so many different types of data to be collected, analyzed, and reported that it is difficult to come up with one system to satisfy all those stakeholders' expectations as well as our own needs.”

“Rubric design and careful assessment of candidates.”

“The difficulty in creating authentic assessments.” (Taskstream survey)

# Data Collection and Management - Activities

Includes activities connected to the actual implementation of assessments to measure student learning or program outcomes:

- Collecting data
- Generating data
- Cleaning data
- Storing data
- Retrieving data

## Data Collection and Management - Favorable Aspects

“I enjoy gathering and seeing all the student data that is accumulated annually. It is the fruit of a year's worth of labor and the program chair are always ecstatic to receive the data.”

“Thinking through how to do a meaningful experiment/assessment and then carrying it out.”

“Gathering and sharing evidence of student learning.”

# Data Collection and Management - Challenges

“Finding the data and getting it into a format that is useable. Plus the realization that you aren't collecting the right data - or someone else is using a different assessment scale! Drives me crazy!”

“It's incredibly difficult to streamline and organize everything when there are constantly so many moving parts.”



# Data Analysis - Activities

Includes **quantitative and qualitative analysis** of data leading to the discovery of trends, identification of gaps, and diagnosis of strengths / weaknesses:

- Interpreting assessment data
- Running statistical analyses
- Summarizing data in a meaningful/concise way
- Drawing conclusions from assessment data
- Finding patterns in assessment data

# Data Analysis - Roles

- Job postings for assessment specialists require both **quantitative and qualitative methods expertise**, with job titles that have the words analyst, accreditation, evaluation, and policy specifically focusing on quantitative skills.
- Frequently asked to assist faculty with the **assessment of student learning**.
- Requires extensive expertise in **assessment practices** as well as a **variety of methodologies**.
- Must be able to **formulate measurable questions, collect** assessment data, **analyze** results, **report** assessment results, and **assist with the utilization** of results.
- **Facilitate conversations** with campus stakeholders around assessment as well as **offer professional development** to stakeholders on how to assess their students (Jankowski & Slotnik, 2015).

# Data Analysis - Favorable Aspects

“Using assessment results to determine strengths and weakness of a phenomenon and to use assessment results to guide future decisions for institutional improvement.”

“I really enjoy seeing the results in a quantitative way of how well a class went, and then comparing it against other results to look for actionable trends.”

“Developing data into useful information that others can use to close the loop.”

“Assessment enables us to impose order and find patterns within information that would not be discernible in the absence of evaluative processes.” (Taskstream survey)

# Data Analysis - Challenges

“My discomfort with complex statistical analyses and when we can't make statements on outcomes because of the data.”

“I am not trained in data analysis and feel quite limited by this lack of knowledge.”

“Crunching the data to produce a meaningful, understandable report, and not trusting the metrics.”

“I dislike the data analysis part of assessment simply because I am not good at it.”

“What I enjoy least about assessment is analyzing and interpreting the data derived from assessment tools.”

“All the details of data collection and analysis, especially regarding complicated statistical analysis.” (Taskstream survey)

# Communicating/Sharing Results - Activities

Includes activities such as generating reports and data visualizations, but also “telling stories” about the data and “translating” data into actionable information:

- Answering questions about assessment results
- Sharing evidence of student learning
- Using evidence to show progress over time
- Sharing results with different constituencies (faculty, alumni, prospective students, etc.)
- Generating reports for accountability and accreditation

# Communications/Sharing Results - Role

Job postings targeting the narrator/translator role sought candidates adept at:

- **developing reports** for multiple stakeholders, including accreditors
- assisting faculty with **translating data results** for annual assessment reports
- creating **professional development** workshops for faculty
- **networking across campus**, participating in and leading multidisciplinary teams, and collaborating with faculty from a range of disciplines

An assessment practitioner operating as a narrator/translator is able to **bridge competing demands and frame issues** with a focus on improving student learning.

Assessment practitioners not only **facilitate meaning making of results** and assessment data, but they help, as Maki indicates, “faculty find their voice” and “communicate to different audiences” (Jankowski & Slotnik, 2015)

# Communicating/Sharing Results - Favorable Aspects

“I love using data to tell stories. In higher education "Trust us, we're great" just doesn't cut it anymore. We need to do a better job of telling our story to a skeptical public using information carefully collected using good instrumentation. But we need to focus on meaningful stories, not metrics crafted because they are easy to collect but don't say anything.”

“I enjoy using the raw data to prepare graphics/visualizations to tell meaningful stories that provide a barometer for learning.”

“Being able to communicate to others how we are doing using data to support our assertions.” (Taskstream survey)

# Communicating/Sharing Results - Challenges

- “Communication regarding assessment is sometimes difficult; sometimes this is simply language/terminology but sometimes it points to different cultures regarding the validity/necessity of assessment.”
- “The general confusion and lack of communication surrounding our campus wide assessment initiatives.”
- “Reporting to external agencies (regional and disciplinary accreditation bodies, Board of Education, etc.), especially when metrics are externally mandated and not directly relevant to the quality of education.”
- “Finding ways to document to simply and authentically document progress and getting others to participate.”



# Using Assessment Results - Activities

Includes activities related to planning or implementing changes or interventions informed by assessment results:

- Coordinating internal program review
- Guiding operations, placement, and admissions decisions
- Planning changes to programs and courses
- Creating action plans based on assessment data
- Using assessment results to determine future programming
- Translating data into curriculum changes
- Using assessment results in the context of strategic planning, budgeting, and decision making
- Using assessment results to improve programs and practice

# Using Assessment Results - Role

Job advertisements for the visionary/believer role required candidates to be adept at **building a sustainable culture** of institutional assessment.

Assessment practitioners in this role are “**prophets**” in helping others within the institution see the value of assessment.

To **provide vision**, assessment practitioners need to believe in the ability of assessment to fundamentally enhance student learning, align and alter educational systems to better foster student learning, and **engage in conversations** with various stakeholders about the benefits and value of higher education.

The visionary/believer **sees the larger educational system and national trends**, allowing practitioners to work within what is valued by an institution with an eye toward a greater cause than an individual course and another eye on the lived experience of students.

# Using Assessment Results - Favorable Aspects

“What I enjoy the most about assessment is taking analysis results and applying changes that support better outcomes.”

“Contributing to educational quality through working with academic programs and non-academic units to discover how to use data to guide changes, reform, inform, and ultimately determine if the change is an improvement.”

“Tweaking courses and programs to match students' needs and interests” (Taskstream survey)

# Using Assessment Results - Challenges

“Gathering data and then not using it to make appropriate changes.”

“Overuse, misuse, misinterpretation of data.”

“Implementing new assessment tools has been met with resistance by some faculty members creating difficulty for me in my ability to assess the program.” (Taskstream survey)

Lack of time to get everything done. Cited by 55% of survey respondents (UK Survey)

Structural barriers (administrative silos, policies, obstructionist individuals/offices, etc.) Cited by 30% of survey respondents (UK Survey)

# Contact Information/Resources

Presentation will be made available on the AALHE conference website.

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